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ABSTRACT

Writing across the curriculum involves helping students to learn how to learn by using appropriate parts of the writing process, to understand that certain standards are important if they are to be considered educated, and to ascertain that writing and learning involve similar procedures and methods. At Sinclair Community College, a writing across the curriculum approach was implemented by one instructor through a system of paired classes. Students were offered the opportunity to sign up for specific sections of a writing course and a humanities course, earning three credits for the completion of each. Students do the usual writing assignments for the humanities course, and work on these and other assignments in the writing course. In this way, writing becomes a special way of mastering the content material. The humanities course is structured according to mastery learning techniques in easily manageable units. At the end of each mastery learning unit, the students must produce a written composition to fulfill an assignment, and throughout the unit the students are actively seeking, writing down, and relating information. The humanities and writing classes are scheduled back-to-back, which allows extra flexibility in using class time. (HB)

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PAIRED CLASSES:

WRITE TO LEARN AND LEARN TO WRITE

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
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PAIRED CLASSES: WRITE TO LEARN AND LEARN TO WRITE

Many of you were present at the Writing Across the Curriculum workshop and have already become converted--if you were not already saved prior to coming here--to the promises that followers of this movement hold forth to you and your students. For those of you who didn't get here in time for the workshop, let me supply you with some background information on America's latest education fad. (It is already beginning to supplant computer literacy at our school.)

Let me say first that I don't believe it is a fad, nor do I believe it is new. Simply defined it is nothing more than helping the student learn how to learn by using appropriate parts of the writing process. (Writing used to be only a product: the infamous 5 ¶ , 500-word essay--you know, what other schools taught; now it is looked upon as a process. And as a process leading not only to the product of a written statement but also to the product of increased learning and more efficient learning, we are interested in writing across the curriculum.) Defined this way, we can see that most of us as students were involved in some sort of self-taught writing across the curriculum techniques to pass our courses. We worked out our own system of note-taking and pattern-making so our notes made sense later, and we learned a system for producing all of those term papers and essays without having to spend all of our time at the library or in front of a non-electronic typewriter.

Teachers, in the old days when I went to school, also made use of writing across the curriculum, in assigning us term papers and book reviews and in giving essay exams. We all learned to tolerate, and the professor felt he was inducting us into the academic profession. Unfortunately, after Vietnam, written work fell in disfavor and was replaced by the more scientifically reliable and verifiable use of objective questions and answers: true and false, multiple-choice. The closest a student got to writing was filling in the blank.

Teachers in England and Australia quickly perceived the dangers of such testing to the young mind and began throughout their system, thanks to the work of James Britton, to make a point of formally including writing activities in all the students' subjects.

In America, work in this area has been going on for nearly ten years. But like everything else we do here we tend to go overboard or fly off the handle--and sometimes end up throwing the baby out with the bath water. Thus, sometimes writing across the curriculum has in some schools been suspect if not downright controversial and probably communist-inspired. A great deal of tension is sometimes engendered among faculty and administrators as WAC battles are fought out.

Part of the problem comes from lack of information and our own insecurities. I have found, since I have worked in both armed camps, that there is a great deal of mistrust between English teachers and teachers of the other, real subjects. If a teacher in another subject talks about using writing across the curriculum, the English

teacher begins to feel threatened: someone is trodding on his turf. No one but English teachers can or should or even know enough to teach English. This belief is, ironically, held also by the other side. An English teacher who tries to spread the gospel about WAC seems to threaten many teachers who feel they won't have time to teach their content if they have to spend all of their time teaching spelling, punctuation, and grammar and--**what** is worse--grading all those papers. After all what is the English teacher hired to do? Can't English teachers do their jobs?

The point to be made here and which I have tried to show at Sinclair with the paired classes is that writing across the curriculum is not teaching English. What it is is teaching learning and study skills, ascertaining that certain standards are important if one is to be considered educated, and believing that writing and learning are both processes involving very similar procedures and methods. (I must admit here in passing that I myself do not believe that English teachers are any better equipped to teach writing skills than any one else.)

The usual response I get when I suggest that this is what WAC does is: but why should we have to bother with these--you will even have to admit--elementary things. We are afterall teaching adults with high school educations. This is college and I have my content to cover.

I reply, What good is it to cover your content if no one understands it?

My detractors readily admit that more and more students are more and more stupid these days.

But that is not my point. Sinclair is an urban, comprehensive community college. Our students are not stupid, nor are they dumb. **What** they **are** is academically unsophisticated. They have emerged from their **public** education not having been taught those academic skills that the college-bound were taught. The students that come to Sinclair are generally either first generation college students or part of that vast body of students that were and are still being babysat as general education students: not dumb enough for remedial work but not brainy enough to go on to **college**. Well now they are going to what we insist on calling a college. And they are simply not prepared. Many have never written essays longer than a page. Most have never written a term paper or a paper that required something other than copying from an encyclopedia as the major source of information. Many have no idea how one is to work with a textbook **in order** to get information out of it. And these are the students that some of my colleagues are trying to teach macroeconomics, medical physics, and history to.

If we are to educate our students, we cannot simply fail them when they do not do college-level work. We must make sure that they can operate in the academic world first. All of this preaching is not an indictment of our educational failings; it is simply a way of encouraging you to consider how you can incorporate writing across the curriculum at your school and in your work.

First, there is not just one way or "the" way to go about doing this. Each of us is going to tell about what we have done in our schools. There is no reason why your school has to select any one particular approach. I have found that there are at least five major different approaches. Try and adapt parts of all of them.

Second, I would like to explain why I decided to experiment with a particular approach, what was done, and what some of the results have been.

At Sinclair though everyone talks innovation, innovation is very hard to incorporate into the system. We are too much bothered by concerns of productivity, scheduling by computers, classroom space limitations, among other problems to be able to innovate or experiment as we are told we should. Therefore, I had to select an approach that would not cost the College any money, that would not unnecessarily bog down the capabilities of either the computers or of the counselors in working out schedules for students, and that would not involve any strange or unusual use of space.

Paired classes met all of these conditions; more importantly it passed the test of severest concern: it trespassed on no one else's turf. I teach both in the English Department and the Humanities Department (which includes history). As long as I messed with only my classes, no one else cared what I did. So I did.

What I did is not new. William Irmscher in TEACHING EXPOSITORY WRITING (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979) talks about writing laboratories attached to subjects in other disciplines. And basically this is all I have done, except that the English is not a laboratory formally. The English is the first course of the three-term university parallel sequence.

The student must sign up for specified sections in each course. The student receives separate grades for each course and earns three credit hours for each course successfully completed.

I might mention, by the way, that no attempt was made to require students or force them to take their English composition this way. This approach is simply an alternative for students who elect to take it.

Philosophically I attempted this approach because I believe in the writing across the curriculum ideas and felt that by pairing the two courses I could not only improve students' ability to write but also improve their abilities to learn, by teaching them (showing them) how writing and learning relate.

Does this approach help students learn to write better? George Hillocks, associate professor in the departments of education and English literature and language at the University of Chicago, has compared as statistically as possible several different methods of teaching writing. He found that when students are exposed to the inquiry approach in which they have to find and state specific details to convey experience or use information to develop and support generalizations, their instruction in writing is nearly four times more

effective than such techniques as free writing and over two and a half times more effective than the traditional study of model pieces of writing. I think there are many reasons why this is so, but I don't have time to go into them here.

I think my approach with its basis in skill development and some inquiry methodology does make learning a more active instead of passive process for the student. But if nothing else, it strongly combats two of the greatest problems student writers have in learning to write: having something to write about and having someone to write to. English teachers struggle around these two problems constantly. The pairing of classes solves them because the subject matter is determined by the nonEnglish discipline being taught and the audience becomes the subject matter specialist teaching that discipline. The student cannot fake either knowledge or audience as he often does in a regular English class. (I wrote about hot rods because I know all about hot rods; and teacher is a dummy. And I wrote this paper to my friends; you told us to choose our own audience.) In paired classes, the student is forced to see that writing is a legitimate enterprise. As William Irmscher writes:

> Students do the usual writing assignments for the [other class]. They work on these in the writing classes and have additional assignments, but all of them are based on the material of the core course. Writing thus becomes a special way of mastering the material. But, of primary importance, students have a different attitude toward the way they write. They want the writing to be good becuase a grade is at stake in two classes--double jeopardy. Even though students are doing academic writing in both courses, the writing suddenly seems to have a "real" purpose.

Now, with this as a background, what classes did I pair? For the first experiment, I combined our first English composition course with the introductory Humanities course. The English course has as its objective to teach the students how to write the traditional, academically oriented, expository essay using one of several different methods of development. The Humanities course has as its objectives: to define the humanities and the arts, and to compare the humanities of the Renaissance with the humanities of our own time. Though both courses are relatively simple to my mind and experience, Sinclair students find both difficult because they do not know how to cope with reading assignments and writing assignments. And though Dayton considers itself to be very active in the arts with its own philharmonic orchestra, opera, ballet, and art museum, most of Sinclair's students have not been exposed to any of these cultural institutions. Therefore, not only is the way of studying in the course unfamiliar to them, the subject matter is equally strange.

To help them learn to learn and to learn the content of the humanities course, I long ago structured it according to mastery learning techniques, which stress breaking down the course into easily manageable **units**, providing immediate feedback on **progress**, and permitting work to be **redone**. **Mastery** learning--like writing across the curriculum--is a **pro-active teaching** strategy. The

student must do the learning, but instead of sitting passively listening to what the expert teacher has to say--the student is taken through a series of activities and forced to show how he has learned the necessary information. One of the results of my work has been to show me how well mastery learning and WAC go together to promote lasting learning in students. I must also admit that both methods require tremendous amounts of energy expended and time used up. If you do not wish to or cannot afford to spend the great amounts of energy and time to effect these methods, then don't even begin them. There is nothing worse than a fad poorly done.

At the end of each mastery learning unit the student must produce a written composition to fulfill an assignment. But long before he gets to the end--in fact throughout the unit the student is actively seeking and writing down and relating information: always using writing as an active tool in the learning process.

The Humanities class session is used to teach the Humanities material. The English class session is used to teach the skills of study and of writing. The two classes are scheduled back-to-back in the same room. This has proven to be very useful to the outcome wanted. For example, if a discussion lasts longer than the 50 minute period session students will wait until the discussion is over instead of running out the door. If I need more time for one discipline, I can take the time without disturbing anyone else's schedule. Another example of the benefits of having the classes back-to-back is that the students develop a sense of themselves as a class; they get to know and to trust each other. In a school as large as Sinclair, this is hard to achieve and is one of the drawbacks in going to an urban, non-residential two-year school.

One more thing I should also make clear, this approach involves writing as more than just a tool for evaluating student performance. And the result is to achieve better quality of writing in the student, not just more quantity.

In summary, what I have done worked. The students said so.

Unit V: The Beginning of Our Contemporary World

Purpose:

To demonstrate how and why the Industrial Revolution marks the beginning of our contemporary world.

Activities:

1. Film: "Heroic Materialism"
2. Reading: Chapter 13 of text
3. Reading: "Goethe's Faust and America's Roeblings"

Learning Objectives:

1. While viewing the film, the student will:
   a. define the Industrial Revolution.
   b. list 5 influences of the Industrial Revolution on human life.
   c. Relate the Industrial Revolution to romanticism.

2. While reading "Goethe's Faust and America's Roeblings", the student will:
   a. explain the relationship between God, the Devil, and Man.
   b. define "good and evil" as developed in Faust.
   c. explain how Faustian Man relates to the Industrial Revolution and the engineer, as seen in the building of the Brooklyn Bridge.

3. While reading Chapter 13 of the text, the student will:
   a. define Impressionism, listing 3 characteristics.
   b. identify 3 Impressionist painters and their major works.

Graded Activity: Due:_____

Comparison of Michelangelo's "Creation" (Colorplate 12) with Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte:"

1. List 15 differences.
2. List 15 similarities.
3. Choose from #1 and #2 ten items which show which artist is the greatest artist because of:
   a. his innovations.
   b. his adherence to the ideas of his time.
   c. his expression of his own uniqueness.

4. Finally, in a short paragraph, explain whether one, or both, or neither were examples of the Faustian Man.

Further Reading for Interested Students:

1. Kenneth Clark, The Romantic Rebellion
2. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations and Oliver Twist
3. Flaubert, Madame Bovary
4. Goethe, Faust
5. Thomas Hardy, Less of the D'Urbervilles and Mayor of Casterbridge
6. Ibsen, The Doll's House
7. Lytten Strachey, Queen Victoria
8. Matthew Josephson, The Robber Barons

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